

# TRANSITIONS IN TELEVISION





## CHAPTER XII

### TRANSITIONS IN TELEVISION

Transitions are the changes from one picture to another. They are electronic in nature and include:

- Cut
- Fade
- Dissolve
- Superimposition
- Wipe
- Defocus Transition
- Object or Effect Transition

These time-consuming bridges should never be used without proper basis. It must be remembered that they should not become so prominent in themselves as to interfere with the very scenes they introduce or end. The cut will keep a tight relationship between actions; the other transitions will allow for more time to elapse between actions and will usually be used in pairs — whatever transition started the scene or segment, will conclude it.

#### 1. The Cut

This is the most frequently used form of transition in television. A cut, in itself, is non-existent. It is simply a term used to mean the immediate change (instantaneous juxtaposition) from one picture to another.

a. **Continuity:** The well-cut show will follow a logical sequence. All shots will bear a relationship to each other. There should be no harsh cut for the viewer, unless such a reaction is intended for a dramatic reason.

Transitions should usually follow the same visual sequence of observation that the viewer will experience in real life. First, the total view of a scene is observed; next, the main point of interest is singled out as a closer look takes place; then a study in detail of the main subject is made. After this singling out of detail is satisfied, the viewer moves back again to see the elements in relation to their setting. In other words, the sequence is the usual continuity of long shot, medium, close-up and back to wide shot.

It should be noted that this logical progression should not tie the director to any ironclad set of rules. Often, for the purpose of drama, the substance of a scene can be caught more effectively by beginning with a close-up of an element and then using the wider shot to show location. This is the reverse procedure, using close-up first, then medium, then long shot. The detail of the close-up, however, must have dramatic importance to the sequence in which it is utilized.

A cut from a long shot to extreme close-up of the same subject should be avoided; instead, the intermediate shot should be used. Furthermore, a series of tight close-up cuts should be left out of any continuity as the mismatching of objects shocks the transitions and the viewer needs an occasional overall look.

It must be realized that the viewer usually remembers only the scene previous to the one being shown. The re-establishment shot is needed to carry the mind



of the viewer back to the entire scene before further developing the continuity. Any new entrance or action usually demands a wide shot to show the total area again.

b. **Cuts of Matching Image:** Cameras should not be permitted to feed two shots with the same pictorial composition. This is a waste of available facilities. There is a general tendency on the part of inexperienced personnel to overdo the cover shot. In order to avoid this, the director should know how long it will take his camera to get a cover shot. He should be prepared to use it when necessary, thus freeing his camera for close-ups and other shots. He should not allow himself to be placed in the position of having to cut to a similar shot in order to break a camera.

If the pictorial composition of two shots is almost identical, a cut between them should not be used.

c. **New Angle Cut:** A cut to a new angle is a rule often followed in transitions. It will give a scene two perspectives. Minor mismatching also will not be so noticeable with new angle cuts. This rule of change of angles for variety must not be misused. The misuse results when the new angle fails to keep the viewer oriented. A new background, for example, should not be suddenly thrust behind the main subject by this type of cut. If the angle cut makes the subject unknown in the new transition, it should not be used.

d. **Matching of Screen Direction:** The director must always keep the proper orientation in his transition by maintaining direction. A simple rule to follow is not to cut to a camera that would suddenly view the subject from the opposite side of the stage.

With moving objects in front of the camera, it must also be remembered to keep them moving in the same direction. If the subjects start moving from left to right, the director must make sure all the following shots are also from left to right. Whatever is moving in a certain direction in one shot, must be moving in the same direction in the next shot. When an object moves between two cameras, so that the cameras shoot it from two opposite sides, facing each other, a switch in the direction of movement will occur if a transition is executed between the cameras.

e. **Timing of the Cut:** The rate of time elapsing between transitions has a decided influence on the presentation of any program. All programs have their own inherent pace and transitions should be made in accordance with this pace. The rhythm of the action sets the rhythm of the transition. The pace of a show comes from writing — timing and tempo, from the director. Transitions are allowable only if they catch the tempo or emotional content.

The content of a shot determines the period of time it should be seen. The shot that introduces an entirely new image demands a longer time on the screen than one showing something already well known to the viewer. If the subject is simple, it requires a brief shot for comprehension, while complex subjects require a longer time on the screen so as to be understood. The shot should be held long enough for full understanding and kept short enough to remain interesting.

Fast cuts, where the pace is tranquil, will be incongruous. A fast-paced scene requires swift cutting, jumping from one element to another.

A rapid series of transitions is not the rule in television. Too much cutting leads to repetition of shots. If the director has a good shot on one camera, he does not have to make a new cut until the pace demands it.

f. **Cut during Movement of Subject:** Movement of subject provides one of the best times for a cut. As the movement takes place — while the action is under way —

## MATCHING SCREEN DIRECTION

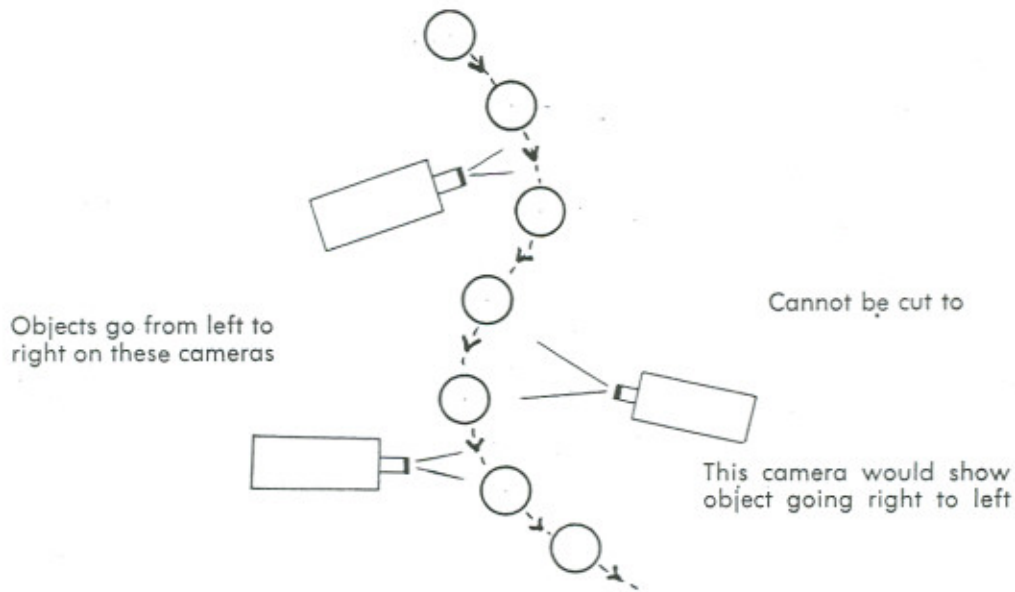


Diagram Q

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## MOVING OBJECTS IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA

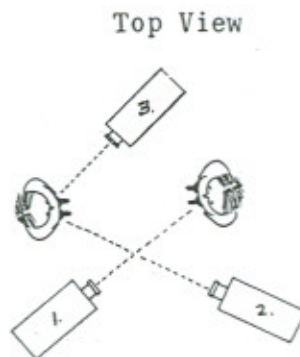


Diagram R

Shots of camera 1 and 2 should usually match in composition type of shot-close-up, medium shot, over-the-shoulder, etc.

Note: Cross shooting as shown is a usual camera set-up as it allows best possible viewpoint of performers. Alternating over-the-shoulder shots are of value.

Cuts on camera 1 and 2 would be logical to follow dialogue, but a cut on camera 3 would not work as the direction of the glance of the person on camera 3 would be a reverse in direction.



the eyes of the viewer will not be stopped on a non-moving area. He will be closely following the action. A cut at a moment of action is thus concealed because it comes at a natural transition spot. A common example of the action cut is the cut from a close-up of a performer seated, to a wide carry shot as he rises.

A cut on action should usually be taken at the beginning of the movement, rather than at a point that breaks a continuous action. Action cuts can also be made at the end of the movement or at a point of hesitation in the move. Even a cut in the middle of some movements is often acceptable. The main thing to catch in any action cut is the start of the action and the consequence of the movement.

**g. Cut to Sound:** Although the audio of a program must always be considered in making a cut of any kind, it can often be the basis for a cut. In dialogue, it is logical to cut at the completion of a sentence — or in a song, at the end of a verse or chorus — but the cut should not break the flow of audio. The director should cut to the performer, just before he speaks, setting the shot for the dialogue to follow. Close-up cuts on dialogue can best be done where there are distinct pauses. This also allows for a delayed reaction shot. In a scene of rapid exchange of conversation, it is best to carry it on a cover shot, as a series of fast cuts will be jarring. This rule does not apply if the content of the dialogue has strong, dramatic overtones.

An excellent opportunity for a cut is the introduction of any new sound in a scene. The viewer will immediately want to see the cause of the new sound.

Music will provide an excellent basis for the cut or dissolve in the musical show. Accurate cutting in these shows builds with the music as visual variety takes place. The cut should always be made on the beat, and, if showing an instrumental section, the transition must catch the start of the segment. If the music has constant change, it should be cut accordingly. If not, the director must not make any transitions which would break the flow of audio.

**h. Cut to Reaction:** Reaction shots are a major obligation which the television director owes his audience. If a director merely cuts to each person as he speaks, and never shows reactions of other people in the scene, he will lose many of the most dramatic phases of the scene. Initially, the viewer wants to be introduced to every performer. Once he knows the speaker at any given point, he wants to see the reaction of the person being addressed, particularly if the reaction has dramatic importance. The viewer wants to see the face of the suspect, as the detective announces the victim was not stabbed, but was poisoned.

The cut should come before the facial expression materializes. It is far more dramatic to see the expression of the face change than to see only the completed change. In modern drama, especially with its inward emotions, some of the greatest heights of conflict are found, not in the lines, but in the silent expression of actors.

**i. Insert Cut:** In dramatic programs, the insert cut is a valuable facet of cutting because it makes the viewer feel ahead of the story. He gets a feeling of being in the drama by uncovering, for himself, important facts about the action.

The insert gets its name because it punches into the main scene. For example, a close-up of the villain's hand placing the poison in one of two glasses of wine. The insert is used for the build-up in action scenes; the contrast builds up the force of the main action.

**j. Cut-away:** The cut-away uses subject matter other than in the main scene. It cuts away to a subject that is related or undergoing simultaneous action. The cut-



away must have a definite relationship to the main scene in order to be understood. The expression of a person watching the exchange of conversation between two main characters is a demonstration of the use of the cut-away.

The cut-away often adds a great deal to remote shows. At a sporting event it will contribute to the enjoyment of the home viewer by adding shots of sidelights going on — fans at the event — colorful surroundings. The director should not cut away if it will mean missing something important in the main action.

## **2. The Fade**

The fade-out is performed by the screen being gradually taken to a point of black. The fade-in is performed when the screen intensity is brought up to normal gain from black. The fade-out signifies the conclusion of a segment of the program. The fade-in starts a new segment.

Fades may be fast or slow, depending upon the amount of emphasis the transition needs. A fast fade, for example, will tie the adjoining scenes tightly, whereas the slow fade will announce a definite conclusion. In any case, the fade denotes a distinct pause in continuity.

A point to remember is the fact that the attention of the audience will also fade when the screen fades. A black screen can be most upsetting to the viewer when he wants to get back to the story or variety program. All fades should be pre-set so that the new picture is always ready to be brought in after the proper amount of division has taken place.

At the conclusion of any segment in a program, the director must always be prepared to go black at the precise moment of the conclusion. One of the most recurring violations is to leave performers frozen in their final action, while waiting for the camera to leave them. If the announcer has said goodbye, the director must get away from him. The reverse holds true for the fade-in to the performer who is about to speak or act. Nothing is worse than to see the performer watching for his cue, receive it, and then start his action. In order to overcome this common fault, the director should have the cue given to the performer, then fade-in on him as he is in motion, if acting, or about to speak, if using dialogue.

## **3. The Dissolve**

The dissolve is performed by fading out one picture and overlapping it with a new image started at low intensity and raised to normal level. The dissolve does not have the degree of definite pause of the fade. The rate of execution of the dissolve is also made to coincide with the requirements of the scenes it joins.

The importance of the time of transition lies in the fact that it has no independent existence. This provides a striking punctuation between the images it divides. The effective dissolve has a smooth, rolling effect as its distinctive quality. In dramatic programs, dissolves are generally used for transitions to denote a time lapse. In non-dramatic programs, a variety-musical show, for example, a slow musical number is often handled best by dissolves, as cuts would interfere with the smoothness of the number. News programs, on the other hand, usually demand the snap and punctuation of cuts.

There is a tendency to over-use the dissolve, since it can be done electronically as easily as a cut. The dissolve must not be used when the cut is more suitable. Neither should it be used merely to attain variety in shots. This is not sufficient reason for a dissolve.



The matched dissolve is a useful effect for producing visual novelty. Two similar figures, one on each of two cameras, are required. The respective size of the identical elements, as well as the placement in the frame, must have an exact match. When a dissolve from one camera to the other is made, the second figure will appear to grow out of the first. This type of dissolve should be used only if the objects merit dramatic importance.

In any dissolve, it must be understood that for an instant both pictures in the transition are on the air at the same time. This can produce some objectionable overlays in a slow dissolve. For example, a head close-up dissolving into a profile close-up will show the ears merging and growing out of the nose of the performer.

#### **4. The Superimposition**

The superimposition is a fixed double exposure obtained by placing one picture over another with the combination going through the television system at the same time. This interweaving of shots should be used only with good reason and definite purpose, as the results can be confusing to the viewer.

Superimposition has excellent potentialities for creating illusory images, spirits and the like.

These double exposures can also be useful in certain musical shows. Supering the slogans for the sponsor's products is common practice in commercial television. Supers also can be employed to provide definite identification across the bottom of the screen — the speaker at a convention, for example.

There must be sufficient contrast range in the two images to make supers effective. The background should be relatively low key and not cluttered. Lettering for a super is usually white on gray.

#### **5. The Wipe**

This transition removes the old picture by starting the newshot in one area and crossing the screen until it wipes off the previous picture. Movies have used this transition extensively.

The horizontal wipe has its place in television. This is often used for split screen telephone conversations and the like. Engineers can provide a variety of types of wipes, but this transitional device has little value for the dramatic program as it draws attention to itself and the screen, thereby interfering with the viewer's ability to concentrate on story content. Whenever a technique brings attention to the surface of the screen with a so-called gimmick, it will disrupt the reality of the shots. Thus, the legitimate use of the wipe is rare and its use must always be justified.

The wipe has value in musical programs and commercials. Since this type of programming requires that attention be brought to the screen, the wipe has an effective value. Two musical instruments, for example, can be wiped in together as they are being played.

#### **6. The Defocus Transition**

In order to accomplish a defocus transition, the director will rack a camera out of focus, make a dissolve to another camera out of focus and slowly bring the second camera into focus on the new scene. This transition is sometimes used for flash-backs or dream sequences. As an example, a person falling asleep as the defocus takes place, the new camera will come into focus to reveal the sleeper's dream.

The defocus transition can also be used as a unique carry-over to a new subject. As the first camera goes out of focus, the dissolve can be made to the second camera which will create a visual surprise by presenting a new subject in focus.

The defocus transition, it must be remembered, is only a gimmick transition and the director must be sure the subjects are worthy of this attention.

#### **7. Object or Effect Transition**

The director can often use, as a transitional device, an object of symbolism in connection with his electronic transition. An object within a scene brought into tight close-up — a fire, for example — can be an effective opening or closing to a segment of violence. These are legitimate uses of symbolic objects or effects within a scene, but they must have direct relation and meaning to the script or segment of the show.